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THE UNDISCOVERED “WITCHES” OF THE BIBLE: ON THE ABSENCE OF EZEKIEL 13:17–23 IN THE EARLY MODERN WITCHCRAFT DEBATE

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Sunt enim dilucida & perspicua testimonia tum ex ipsa sacrosancta Scriptura, tum etiam ex aliis autoribus deprompta, quæ planè testificantur extare in mundo tale veneficorum genus, quos & Satánicos & Sortiarios diximus.

—Lambert Daneau, *Dialogus de veneficiis*, 1574¹

In the Hebrew Bible, in Ezekiel 13:17–23, we find a diatribe against false prophetesses. The prophet’s attack on these women is preserved in a highly complex text, riddled with text-critical issues and *hapax legomena*—that is, terms appearing just once in the corpus of the Hebrew Bible. Ezekiel accuses them of entrapping souls and manipulating life and death. Many scholars have interpreted this obscure text as a reference to witchcraft; these women are understood by Ezekiel to be engaged in harmful magic. However, it has also been argued that the prophet is delivering a polemic against necromancy or certain midwifery rituals. Although the precise nature of the women’s

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1. Lambert Daneau, *Dialogus de veneficiis* (Geneva, 1574), II, 30. This quotation was translated into English as: “There are playne and evident testimonies to be gathered out of holy scriptures, and also of other aucthours, most evidently confirming that there are such kindes of witches in the world, which we cal divelish sorcerers”; Lambert Daneau, *A Dialogue of Witches, in Foretime Named Lot-tellers, and Now Commonly Called Sorcerers*, trans. Thomas Twyne (London, 1575), sig. C8.

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activities remains shrouded in mystery, their description contains elements that are reminiscent of the learned concept of witchcraft as it circulated throughout Europe in the early modern period. Nevertheless, although early modern demonologies are full of scriptural references, Ezek. 13:17–23 is noticeably absent from them. This article compares the depiction of these women and their activities in Ezekiel with the portrayal of the witch and her *maleficium* in the early modern witchcraft debate. It further explains why the demonologists overlooked this passage by examining its reception history from the period of the early church onward. As it transpires, only long after the early modern witch hunts did this obscure scriptural passage come to be better understood, thanks to the rapid advances in ancient Near Eastern archaeology and the burgeoning field of anthropology. From the mid-nineteenth century archaeological and anthropological studies brought forward parallels with these women’s activities, which cast a wholly new perspective on this passage.

I. EZEKIEL’S FEMALE ADVERSARIES: WITCHES, NECROMANCERS, OR MIDWIVES?

Chapter 13 in the Book of Ezekiel begins with an oracle against false male prophets (verses 1–16). God’s wrath shall strike these prophets because they misled his people with their empty visions and false divinations. The second part of the chapter (verses 17–23) is a highly complex text, riddled with text-critical issues and *hapax legomena*. It contains God’s condemnation of a group of female exiles who, just like the false male prophets, live in the Judean community in sixth-century BCE Babylonia.² The passage reads as follows:³

^{Verse 17} As for you, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people, who prophesy out of their own hearts; prophesy against them ^{Verse 18} and say, Thus says the Lord God: Woe to the women who sew bands for every wrist⁴ and make veils for the heads of every size to ensnare souls. Will you ensnare the souls of my people

2. For a discussion on the date and Babylonian setting of Ezekiel’s ministry, see David S. Vanderhooft, “Ezekiel in and on Babylon,” in *Bible et Proche-Orient, Mélanges André Lemaire III*, eds. Josette Elayi and Jean-Marie Durand (Paris: Gabalda, 2014), 99–119 and the literature cited therein.

3. The English translation is by the present author and based on the Hebrew text as published in the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, ed. Karl Elliger and Willhelm Rudolph (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983).

4. Or: “elbow”/“arm-pit.”

but let your own souls live? ^{Verse 19} You have profaned me before my people for⁵ handfuls of barley and pieces of bread, killing those who should not die and keeping alive those who should not live, by telling lies to my people, who listen to lies. ^{Verse 20} Therefore, thus says the Lord God: Look, I am against your bands with which you ensnare souls for flying. ^{Verse 21} I will tear them from your arms and set free the souls whom you ensnare for flying. ^{Verse 22} I will tear off your veils and save my people from your hands so that they will no longer be prey in your hands; and you will know that I am the Lord. ^{Verse 23} Because you have deceitfully disheartened the righteous, whom I did not cause any pain, and strengthened the hands of the wicked so that they would not turn from their evil ways and save their lives, ^{Verse 23} therefore, you will no longer see empty visions or practice divination; I will save my people from your hands. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

Just like the false male prophets whom Ezekiel berated in the previous verses, these women are accused of having invented their messages, but in addition they have engaged in obscure practices such as trapping souls.⁸ They are killing those who should live and keeping alive those who should die. In these obscure rituals they are using bodily accessories. The exact nature of these accessories remains unknown because the terms *mispāhōt* and *kēsātōt*, first mentioned in verse 18, are *hapax legomena*. They seem to refer to some sort of headgear and something sewed to the arm or wrist, respectively.⁹ However, the Lord will save the righteous from these women, who will no longer see empty visions or practice divination. Interestingly, although the prophet addresses them as “the daughters of your people who *prophesy*,” he does not explicitly designate them as *nēbī’ōt* “prophetesses,” although elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible this title is given to female prophets who were active

5. Or: “with,” i.e. the handfuls of barley and pieces of bread might be used in these women’s rituals rather than being a means of payment.

6. Or: “like birds.”

7. Or: “like birds.”

8. In this passage, the term *nēpēš* “soul” is generally understood holistically, referring to a whole person, rather than a disembodied entity. Contrast Saggs, who calls this holistic view an *ipsedixitism*; Henry W. F. Saggs, “External Souls in the Old Testament,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 19 (1974): 1–12. See further Richard C. Steiner, *Disembodied Souls: The Nefesh in Israel and Kindred Spirits in the Ancient Near East, with an Appendix on the Kutumuwa Inscription* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), who regards this passage as the “smoking gun” for the idea that the ancient Israelite *nēpēš* was sometimes understood as a disembodied soul (5).

9. For the interpretative history of these hapaxes, see Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 28–45.

in pre- and post-exilic times and whose authority seems to have been acknowledged in Israelite society.¹⁰

Among the modern scholars who regard these women as prophetesses, there is a vast discrepancy in the way they reflect on the nature of their prophecy. For instance, according to Brownlee:¹¹

In this passage we witness prophecy at its highest level sitting in judgment upon prophecy at its lowest level. The ethical prophet who preaches a spiritual religion denounces the prophetesses whose activities are on the materialistic and superstitious plane.

Brownlee thus hints here at gender opposition in ancient Israelite prophecy: the prophet's message is seen as serving a higher, spiritual purpose and divinely inspired, whereas the divinatory practices of these prophetesses are cast aside as mere fortune-telling.¹²

According to Ezekiel's description, the eerie practices of these women have seemingly little to do with true, God-given prophecy, and the precise nature of their activities has been the subject of much debate. The common

10. Miriam (Exod. 15:20), Deborah (Judg. 4:4), Isaiah's wife (Isa. 8:3), Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14; 2 Chr. 34:22), and Noadiah (Neh. 6:14). Sedlmeier does not want to read too much into the absence of the term *n'bf'ôl* in our passage because he does not consider it an honorific title per se. He argues that the false male prophets in verses 1–16 are explicitly addressed as *n'bf'im* "prophets" but the term has acquired such a negative connotation in that passage that we cannot take the absence of *n'bf'ôl* here as proof of discrimination against these women; Franz Sedlmeier, "Wie Füchse in den Ruinen . . . : Falsche Prophetie und Krisenzeit nach Ez 13," in *Gottes Wege suchend; Beiträge zum Verständnis der Bibel und ihrer Botschaft. Festschrift für Rudolf Mosis zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Franz Sedlmeier (Würzburg: Echter, 2003), 293–321, esp. 301–2.

11. William H. Brownlee, "Exorcising the Souls from Ezekiel 13:17–23," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 69 (1950): 367–73, esp. 373.

12. Greenberg also regards these women as "fortune-tellers"; Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20* (AB 22; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 240. Brenner understands them as "magician prophetesses," a specifically female profession which developed among the Babylonian exiles and which gained such an amount of influence and popularity that Ezekiel felt compelled to rage against them since they were "an illegitimate activity in terms of Israelite religion." The women had adopted these magical divinatory techniques from the Babylonian culture by which they were surrounded; Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 74–75. Sedlmeier regards both the men and the women as false prophets, but he states that Ezekiel accuses the women in particular of divining from auspices or omens, which was common practice in Babylonia; Sedlmeier, "Wie Füchse," 311.

scholarly opinion is that these women are understood by Ezekiel to be practicing witchcraft, the kind of manipulative magic they may have been accustomed to in their Babylonian surroundings.¹³ The idea of a possible connection between the Hebrew vocabulary in our passage and Akkadian terminology can be traced back to Delitzsch, who interpreted the obscure Hebrew term *k'sāṭōt* as "bands"/"fetters" on the basis of the Akkadian words *kasū* and *kasītu*.¹⁴ It was, however, Herrmann who in his Ezekiel commentary from 1924 explicitly linked our passage with the binding magic mentioned in the Mesopotamian *Maqlū* series of anti-witchcraft incantations.¹⁵ Many scholars have since adopted Herrmann's thesis and regard the women in our passage as witches who, influenced by their Babylonian surroundings, use their

13. See Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997–8), vol. 1, 417; William H. Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1–19* (WBC 28; Waco: Word, 1986), 194–96 (seemingly abandoning his earlier stance; see note 11); Graham I. Davies, "An Archaeological Commentary on Ezekiel 13," in *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip J. King*, ed. Michael D. Coogan et al. (Louisville, K.Y.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 108–25, esp. 121–22; Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 170–71; Ronald M. Hals, *Ezekiel* (FOTL 19; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 88; Saggs, "External Souls," 4–5; Walther Zimmerli, *Ezechiel* (BKAT, 13; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969), vol. 1, 297ff. It has also been argued that two different texts have been interwoven in our passage, one criticizing false prophetesses and the other female magicians, which has resulted in the dual character of these women's activity; see Alfred Bertholet, *Hesekiel* (Tübingen: Paul Siebeck, 1936), 48–49; Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1–19*, 196; cf. Hertrich, according to whom Ezekiel addresses false female prophets while still located in Jerusalem. He considers verses 18b–21, which refer to the magical practices, a later interpolation; Volkmar Hertrich, *Ezechielprobleme* (Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1932), 99–100.

14. Friedrich Delitzsch, "Glossario Ezechielico-Babylonico," in *Liber Ezechielis*, ed. Seligmann Baer (Leipzig: B. Tauchnitz, 1884), xii–xiii. It should be noted, however, that Delitzsch's access to deciphered Akkadian materials was rather limited and that the words *kasū* and *kasītu* are now rather understood as "to bind (magically)" and "binding (magic)," respectively; cf. *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, ed. Martha T. Roth et al., 21 vols. (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1956–2010), 8:243b, 8:250b.

15. Johannes Herrmann, *Ezechiel, übersetzt and erklärt* (Leipzig/Erlangen: Deichert, 1924), 86. On the extensive Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft corpus, see Tzvi Abusch, "Witchcraft Literature in Mesopotamia," in *The Babylonian World*, ed. Gwendolyn Leick (New York: Routledge, 2007), 373–85; Tzvi Abusch and Daniel Schwemer, *Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Rituals*, 3 vols. AMD 8/1–3 (Leiden: Brill, 2011–2020). For an introduction to the *Maqlū* series in particular, see Tzvi Abusch, *The Witchcraft Series Maqlū* (WAW 37; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 1–40; for the critical edition and English translation, see Tzvi Abusch, *The Magical Ceremony Maqlū: A Critical Edition* (AMD 10; Leiden: Brill, 2016).

bands and veils to magically ensnare people and manipulate life and death. Evans takes a more positive stance towards the women in Ezekiel's passage. He doubts whether binding magic was always harmful magic in the ancient Near East. He argues that the Judahite "daughters" are rather practicing defensive and curative binding magic—beneficent magic—similar to that of the Babylonian *āšīpu* "exorcist."¹⁶

Some scholars understand these women to be practicing necromancy.¹⁷ The fetters on the wrists and the headgear are thus seen as tools of the trade; for instance, by Dumermuth, who compares the rituals in our passage with more recent shamanistic and spiritualist practices, whereby the shaman or medium would be bound during a seance as proof of the genuineness of their intermediary activities. Hence he refers to the women in our passage as "weiblichen Medien," who were tied as a means to prevent fraudulent practices and to demonstrate their impressive mediumistic skills.¹⁸ Van der Toorn also believes these women to be necromancers who use their mysterious accessories to communicate with the spirits of the dead. His understanding of this passage is based on the reference to the "flying souls," which he interprets as the dead, who were commonly represented as birds in ancient Near Eastern cultures.¹⁹ Van der Toorn's brief suggestion was elaborated by Korpel: the *n^epāšōt* "souls" are the avian spirits of the dead which the women symbolically catch with bird nets, alluring them with pieces of bread. She points to the concept of the avian spirits of the dead in Ugaritic texts and other ancient Near Eastern materials to strengthen her thesis.²⁰ However,

16. John Evans, "Death-dealing Witchcraft in the Bible? Notes on the Condemnation of the 'daughters' in Ezekiel 13:17–23," *Tyndale Bulletin* 65 (2014): 57–84, esp. 71, 77.

17. We find this idea already proposed in Richard Kraetzschmar, *Das Buch Ezechiel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1900), 135; cf. Sigmund Mowinkel, *Psalmstudien I* (Kristiania: J. Dybwad, 1921), 65. However, this suggestion is by no means unique. The medieval Jewish Bible commentator David Kimḥi (1160–1235) refers to the interpretation of these Judahite women as necromancers in his exegesis of Ezek. 13:23.

18. Fritz Dumermuth, "Zu Ez XIII 18–21," *Vetus Testamentum* 13 (1963): 228–29.

19. Karel van der Toorn, *From Her Cradle to Her Grave: The Role of Religion in the Life of the Israelite and the Babylonian Woman*, trans. Sara J. Denning-Bolle (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 123.

20. Marjo C. A. Korpel, "Avian Spirits in Ugarit and in Ezekiel 13," in *Ugarit, Religion and Culture; Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Ugarit, Religion and Culture, Edinburgh, July 1994*, ed. Nick Wyatt et al. (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1996), 99–113. Zevit argues that these women captured actual birds, luring them with bread and barley, because they were believed to be avian spirits. By catching these birds and depleting their life force, the women could magically prolong the lives of certain people.

according to Korpel, the female mediums in Ezek. 13:17–23 are far from innocent. They are “prophetesses turned sorceresses,”²¹ who manipulate these avian souls for their harmful magic, thereby keeping the evil spirits alive for their nefarious powers and condemning the souls of the righteous to a second death in Sheol. Stökl also suggests that “the daughters of your people” in our passage are necromancers and he compares them to the women who are called *munabbiātu* in several cuneiform texts from twelfth-century BCE Emar. Just like the *munabbiātu*, they may have been well-respected religious specialists who communicated with or cared for the dead.²² Hamori argues that the author of Ezek. 13:17–23 is engaged in a polemic against Yahwistic necromancy: these women are Yahwistic necromancers.²³ She supports the idea advocated by Korpel and Van der Toorn that the *n^opāšōt* are the birdlike spirits of the dead, with whom the women attempt to communicate. Hamori’s view that Ezekiel’s attack on these female necromancers betrays an intra-Yahwistic divinatory conflict is voiced similarly in other recent studies, which state that the oracle represents a demonization of Ezekiel’s female competitors among the religious specialists in the exilic community and aims to marginalize them as unauthorized.²⁴

Another line of interpretation is found in the work of Bowen.²⁵ The language and imagery of the passage remind her of various Mesopotamian

Hence, according to Zevit, these women are practicing manipulative magic rather than necromancy; Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001), 562.

21. Korpel, “Avian spirits,” 104.

22. Jonathan Stökl, “The מַתְנַבְּאוֹת in Ezekiel 13 Reconsidered,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 132 (2013): 61–76. His thesis builds on the parallel which Gruber observed between the Emar *munabbiātu* and the *mitnabb’ōt* “women who prophesy” in our passage; Mayer I. Gruber, “Women in the Ancient Levant,” in *Women’s Roles in Ancient Civilizations: A Reference Guide*, ed. Bella Vivante (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1999), 115–52, esp. 129.

23. Esther J. Hamori, *Women’s Divination in Biblical Literature: Prophecy, Necromancy, and other Arts of Knowledge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 167–83.

24. Rather than these necromancers practicing a popularized version of religion in the margins of society, as held by Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes, “Traces of Women’s Texts in the Hebrew Bible,” in *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 67–71. Further on the idea of an intra-Yahwistic conflict, see Nancy R. Bowen, “The Daughters of Your People: Female Prophets in Ezekiel 13:17–23,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 118 (1999): 417–33, esp. 430–33; Rüdiger Schmitt, “Theories Regarding Witchcraft Accusations in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Social Theory and the Study of Israelite Religion*, ed. Saul M. Olyan (Atlanta: SBL, 2012), 181–94, esp. 191–92.

25. Bowen, “The Daughters of Your People.”

incantations which refer to female cultic functionaries whose medico-magical practices eased or prevented complications during pregnancy and childbirth. They performed binding and loosening rituals, and they used grain and bread to ward off baby-snatching demons. According to Bowen, the female prophets addressed by Ezekiel may have been medical/religious professionals who would aid pregnant and childbearing women and offer prognoses for them through divinatory means, which would explain their ability to preserve or take away lives, as mentioned in verse 19. However, Bowen also briefly suggests that the stereotyped, generic language used in this passage betrays a rhetorical construction which does not seek to discredit a particular form of female Israelite divination, but rather takes aim at a variety of illegitimate magical practitioners.²⁶ Liebermann builds on Bowen's brief suggestion and states that "Ezekiel may not have intended to accurately describe a single historically attested form of mediation in 13:17–23. For rhetorical effect, he may have created a caricature of intermediary activities typically carried out by women."²⁷

FIGHTING THE SAME ENEMY? A COMPARISON BETWEEN EZEKIEL 13:17–23 AND DEMONOLOGICAL THEORY

Although the precise nature of the women's activities remains shrouded in mystery, their description contains elements that are reminiscent of the learned concept of witchcraft which circulated throughout Europe in the early modern period.²⁸ One would thus think that our passage might have resonated with the demonologists, whose arguments for the reality of witches and witchcraft relied heavily on their readings of the Bible.²⁹ Below I discuss

26. Bowen, "The Daughters of Your People," 428–29.

27. Rosanne Liebermann, "For-Profit Prophets: Ezekiel 13:17–23 and the Threat of Female Intermediaries," *Hebrew Studies* 61 (2020): 213–34, esp. 219–20.

28. For a comprehensive analysis of the intellectual treatment of witchcraft in this period, see Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); cf. the succinct discussion on the intellectual foundations of the witch beliefs and their dissemination in Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (London: Longman, 2nd ed., 1995), 27–67. For more general studies on early modern demonology, see Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (eds.), *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Period of the Witch Trials* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press/London: Athlone, 2002), 122–46; Julian Goodare, Rita Voltmer, and Liv H. Willumsen (eds.), *Demonology and Witch-Hunting in Early Modern Europe* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2020); Gerhild Scholz Williams, "Demonologies," in Brian P. Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 69–84.

29. On biblicism in the elite discourse of witchcraft, see Jörg Haustein, "Bibelauslegung und Bibelkritik. Ansätze zur Überwindung der Hexenverfolgung," in *Das*

the similarities between the depiction of the women and their obscure practices in Ezek. 13:17–23 and the portrayal of the witch and her *maleficium* in the early modern European witchcraft debate, without assuming any direct conceptual relationship between this scriptural passage and early modern demonological thinking. Due to the sheer number of demonologies, I limit the references to a few treatises, written by authors who took a hardline stance on witches and witchcraft: Heinrich Kramer (Institoris), *Malleus Maleficarum* (Speyer, 1486/7); Jean Bodin, *De la démonomanie des sorciers* (Paris, 1580); James VI, *Daemonologie* (Edinburgh, 1597); and Martín Del Ríó, *Disquisitionum magicarum* (Louvain, 1599/1600). I also refer to Johann Weyer's *De praestigiis daemonum* (Basel, 1563).³⁰ Weyer was critical of the persecution of alleged witches, but his views were rather moderate compared to those of later skeptics, such as Reginald Scot.³¹ Weyer's demonology is of importance for the present study because it offers detailed descriptions of occult beliefs and practices, even if the author himself tends to doubt their veracity. My comparative analysis is further based on the Hebrew text of Ezek. 13:17–23, as translated into English above.³² Quite a few demonologists, especially

Ende der Hexenverfolgung, ed. Sönke Lorenz and Dieter Bauer (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1995), 249–67. In the first part of his article Haustein explains how the demonologists looked at the Bible through the prism of the cumulative concept of witchcraft, and he poignantly concludes: "Für die Vertreter einer scharfen Gangart bei den Verfolgungen ist klar, daß die Bibel genau von 'ihren' Hexen spricht" ("It is clear to those who adopt a hardline position in the persecutions that the Bible speaks precisely of 'their' witches"; 256).

30. These demonologists, with the exception of Del Ríó, are discussed in Sydney Anglo (ed.), *The Damned Art: Essays in the Literature of Witchcraft* (London: Routledge, 1977). On Del Ríó, see Jan Machielsen, *Martin Delrio: Demonology and Scholarship in the Counter-Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press/British Academy, 2015). Further on these demonologists, see Jan Machielsen (ed.), *The Science of Demons: Early Modern Authors Facing Witchcraft and the Devil* (London: Routledge, 2020).

31. A full-text search of Scot's *Discovery of Witchcraft* did not yield any references to Ezekiel 13. I also consulted Early English Books Online (EEBO), and the few results that came up for Ezekiel 13 were found in theological treatises, not demonologies, and only dealt in passing with the false male prophets referred to in Ezek. 13:1–16; no mentioning was made of the Judahite women.

32. I consulted the Hebrew text of Ezek. 13:17–23 in various incunabula and sixteenth-century Bible editions and, apart from some minor variants in vocalization and orthography, they agree with the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS), upon which my translation is based. The following important editions were compared against the BHS:

- Biblia Hebraica: Torah, Nevi'im, Ketuvim (Soncini edition, 1494), University of Oxford, Christ Church MC.8.29, fol. 212a: <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/3d0818ef-33e1-4889-bc6e-14837979d9fa/>, accessed March 2, 2022. This edition was used by Martin Luther for his German Bible translation.

those belonging to the clergy, had knowledge of Hebrew,³³ or they had access to the Hebrew Bible thanks to their personal consultation of Hebraists.³⁴ Demonologists also relied on the Septuagint and the Vulgate, the ancient Greek and Latin versions, respectively. Hence, where directly relevant to my comparison, I indicate the differences between the Hebrew text of Ezek. 13:17–23 and these versions.³⁵ After my comparative analysis, I examine whether our scriptural passage actually had a role to play in the elite discourse of witchcraft.

Interestingly, when we look at Ezekiel 13 as a whole we see that the men addressed in the first part of the chapter are condemned for falsely proclaiming the word of the Lord, but that the women are accused not only of engaging in false prophecy, just like their male counterparts, but also of practicing harmful rituals and manipulating life and death. Hence a gendered and possibly stereotyped notion of witchcraft seems present in our scriptural passage,³⁶ just as we commonly find it in early modern treatises. The role of gender in demonological theory has been extensively dealt

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- The Complutensian Polyglot Bible (Alcalá de Henares, 1514), vol. 3: https://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcwdl.wdl_10636_003/?sp=255&r=-0.146,0.073,1.677,0.594,0, accessed March 2, 2022. This edition also included the Latin Vulgate, the Greek Septuagint, and the authorised Jewish Aramaic translation of the Pentateuch with its translation in Latin.
 - The Second Rabbinic Bible (Venice, 1524–5), vol. 3: https://archive.org/details/The_Second_Rabbinic_Bible_Vol_3/page/n243/mode/2up, accessed March 2, 2022. This edition, which included medieval Jewish Bible commentaries and the authorized Jewish Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible, was a popular reference tool among Jewish readers and Christian Hebraists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

33. E.g. Bodin, Del Río. See Martín Del Río, *Investigations into Magic*, ed. and trans. Peter G. Maxwell-Stuart (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 2; Lyse Schwarzfuchs, “Encore de l’hébreu: deux hébraïsans méconnus, Godefroy Tilmann et Jean Bodin,” *Revue française d’histoire du livre* 135 (2014): 7–45, esp. 28–44.

34. E.g. Weyer, who relied on the expertise of the orientalist Andreas Masius; Johann Weyer, *Witches, Devils, and Doctors in the Renaissance: Johann Weyer, De praestigiis daemonum*, ed. George Mora, trans. John Shea (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1991), 93.

35. The textual basis for the Septuagint is Rahlfs–Hanhart’s *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006). The text of the Vulgate is based on the *Biblia Sacra Vulgata. Editio quinta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007).

36. On the stereotype of the female witch in biblical and other ancient Near Eastern texts, see Hamori, *Women’s Divination in Biblical Literature*, 118, 203–16.

with in recent scholarship,³⁷ and a thorough treatment of this topic is beyond the scope of the present study. It suffices here to say that in the demonologies women were generally seen as more prone to *maleficium*. Their supposedly irrational and disorderly nature, maliciousness, vindictiveness, weak-mindedness, curiosity, ambitiousness, cupidity, and lustful sexual appetite all contributed to them falling more easily prey to the Devil and his demons than men:³⁸

PHI. [. . .] What can be the cause that there are twentie women giuen to that craft, where ther is one man?

EPI. The reason is easie, for as that sexe/is frailer then men is, so it is easier to be intrapped in these grosse snares of the Deuill, as was ouer well proued to be true, by the Serpents deceiuing of *Eua* at the beginning, which makes him the homelier with that sexe sensine.

However, many of these ideas were rooted in classical, patristic, and medieval Christian beliefs about the female disposition that had pervaded high culture long before the start of the early modern witchcraft debate. Subsequently, we should not attribute the origins of the gendered (and often misogynistic) witch stereotype solely to the demonologists. Their writings greatly

37. See, in particular, Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 106–33; cf. Tamar Herzig, “The Bestselling Demonologist: Heinrich Institoris’s *Malleus maleficarum*,” in Jan Machielsen (ed.), *The Science of Demons: Early Modern Authors Facing Witchcraft and the Devil* (London: Routledge, 2020), 53–67; Alison Rowlands, “Witchcraft and Gender in Early Modern Europe,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, ed. Brian P. Levack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 449–67, esp. 454–59. An extensive discussion on the role of male witches in the elite discourse is found in Rolf Schulte, *Man as Witch: Male Witches in Central Europe*, trans. Linda Froome-Döring (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 92–159.

38. The following dialogue between Philomathes (= PHI) and Epistemon (= EPI) in James VI’s *Daemonologie* II v is taken from James VI and I, *Minor Prose Works of King James VI and I: ‘Daemonologie’, ‘The True Lawe of Free Monarchies’, ‘A Counterblaste to Tobacco’, ‘A Declaration of Sports’*, ed. James Craigie (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 1982), 30. For further demonological discussions on the female disposition (and women’s susceptibility to witchcraft), see Jean Bodin, *On the Demon-Mania of Witches*, abridged, trans., and ed. Randy A. Scott and Jonathan L. Pearl (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1995), 186; Del Río, *Investigations into Magic*, 121, 125, and 130; *The Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarum*, ed. and trans. Christopher S. Mackay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 159–73; Weyer, *Witches, Devils, and Doctors*, 181–83.

contributed to the feminization of witchcraft, but they are not at the root of this intellectual tradition. The elite discourse of witchcraft further advocated the idea that the witch did not work in isolation, but was part of a group of like-minded devil worshippers. The application of this idea in the witchcraft trials sometimes led to a tragic chain reaction of accusations, confessions (often under torture), and naming of accomplices.³⁹

We have the recent accounts, especially from Casale in Piedmont, where it was noticed that a person named Androgina went into other people's houses, and soon after the people died. She was apprehended, and she confessed the conspiracy of all her fellow witches, about forty in number, who smeared door latches to bring death upon people.

The idea of a witches' coven⁴⁰ was often, but not exclusively, expressed as part of the Sabbat concept, whose impact on demonological thinking varied across Europe.⁴¹ According to our scriptural passage, the women did not seem to work in isolation either, since Ezekiel addresses them as a collective, as a

39. The following quotation is taken from Bodin, *Demon-Mania*, 199–200. For further references to witches' covens and assemblies, either all female or mixed in gender, see *ibid.*, 41, 115, 118–20, 130, 177; Del Río, *Investigations into Magic*, 28, 35, 91–98, 114; James VI, *Daemonologie* (ed. Craigie), 25–27, 30; *The Hammer of Witches* (ed. and trans. Mackay), 212, 283; Weyer, *Witches, Devils, and Doctors*, 213, 519. For a nuanced discussion on the occurrence of chain-reaction trials, see H. C. Erik Midelfort, "Witch Craze?: Beyond the Legends of Panic," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 6.1 (2011): 11–33.

40. The term "coven" is not meant here in the sense of Margaret Murray's commonly dismissed notion of secret covens, each one consisting of thirteen witches, which kept pagan fertility rituals alive. For a critical discussion of her deeply flawed yet influential theory, see Jacqueline Simpson, "Margaret Murray: Who Believed Her, and Why?," *Folklore* 105 (1994): 89–96; cf. Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 100.

41. Further on the Sabbat concept, its origins and diffusion across Europe, see Michael Bailey, "The Medieval Concept of the Witches' Sabbath," *Exemplaria* 8 (1996): 419–39; Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 11–30, 85–86, 138–42; Levack, *Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 38–44; Jonathan L. Pearl, "Sabbat," in *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition*, ed. Richard M. Golden (4 vols.; Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 987–92. On the historiography of the witches' Sabbat, see Willem de Blécourt, "Sabbath Stories: Towards a New History of Witches' Assemblies," in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, ed. Brian P. Levack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 84–100; cf. Willem de Blécourt, "The Return of the Sabbat: Mental Archaeologies, Conjectural Histories or Political Mythologies?," in *Palgrave Advances in Witchcraft Historiography*, ed. Jonathan Barry and Owen Davies (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 125–45.

"women's guild."⁴² Hence the gendered and collective notion of witchcraft is the first parallel that we can draw between Ezek. 13:17–23 and demonological theory.

Furthermore, there are similarities between the seemingly occult practices of the Judahite women and the *maleficium* described in the writings of the early modern demonologists. As discussed above, the women in Ezek. 13:17–23 are often thought to be practicing some sort of binding magic which enabled them to manipulate life and death. They used their accessories to magically tie and release their victims.⁴³ In the demonologies we also come across references to binding magic. Bodin, for example, condemns the tiers of codpiece strings, whose ligatures can obstruct people's body parts and bodily functions, causing all sorts of ailments, such as impotence, frigidity, and bodily swellings, which can even lead to the victim's death.⁴⁴ Bodin explains that the perpetrators often tie the codpiece strings whilst attending a marriage ceremony and that this practice has ancient roots, as attested by Herodotus and the Epicureans. He further emphasizes the diabolical nature of this binding magic, thereby even stating that its practitioners deserve to be put to death:⁴⁵

And one ought not to marvel if the Devil makes great use of such ligatures, for first of all it prevents the procreation of the human race, which he tries as much as he can to exterminate. In the second place it removes the sacred bond of friendship between husband and wife. Thirdly, those who are bound go and commit wanton acts or adultery. It is therefore hateful impiety, and one which merits death, as we

42. Wilda C. Gafney, *Daughters of Miriam: Women Prophets in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 108. Further on the idea that female diviners sometimes worked as a collective in ancient Israel and Mesopotamia, see Van der Toorn, *From Her Cradle to Her Grave*, 125, 132.

43. The Septuagint has interpreted the obscure Hebrew terms *k'sāiōt* and *mispāhōt* as *προσκεφάλαια* "cushions" and *ἐπιβόλαια* "veils," respectively (cf. Vulgate *pulvillos* "small cushions" and *cervicalia* "pillows"). In the Septuagint these women use their cushions and veils to gather and pervert souls, seemingly for magical or apotropaic purposes, and, in accordance with the Hebrew text, they are capable of killing and preserving them. Cf. John W. Olley, *Ezekiel (Septuagint Commentary): A Commentary Based on Iezekiēl in Codex Vaticanus* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 308.

44. Bodin, *Demon-Mania*, 98–101.

45. Bodin, *Demon-Mania*, 101; cf. *ibid.*, 212–13. For more demonological references to binding magic, see Del R o, *Investigations into Magic*, 120–21, 130; James VI, *Daemonologie* (ed. Craigie), 8; *The Hammer of Witches* (ed. and trans. Mackay), 256, 553; Weyer, *Witches, Devils, and Doctors*, 335–37, 377. On ligatures in the elite discourse of witchcraft, see Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 88–89.

shall argue in due course. Nevertheless most of those who make use of such ligatures have no express agreement with the Devil, and do not invoke him, but it is quite certain that he is always with such people . . .

In the Hebrew text of our scriptural passage we find the verb *šûd* “to entrap, to hunt” in verses 18 and 20 and the noun *m^ešûda* “hunting net, prey” in verse 21; the Judahite women are hunting or ensnaring souls, and God’s people are prey in their hands.⁴⁶ This type of entrapment and hunting imagery is common in the elite discourse of witchcraft, wherein it is usually reserved for the Devil and his demons, who are on the prowl and lay traps and snares, thereby using witches as their instruments. For instance in the *Malleus Maleficarum*, according to which the dangerous woman mentioned in Ecclesiastes 7:27⁴⁷ is a witch, a demonic snare:⁴⁸

This is the woman mentioned in Ecclesiastes 7[:27] and about whom the Church now laments because of the huge number of sorceresses: “I have found woman {sic} more bitter than death. She is a hunters’ snare, her heart is bait, and her hands are chains. He who pleases God will shun her. He who is a sinner will be captured by her.” { . . . } She is called a snare of hunters, that is, of demons, because men are captured not merely through carnal desires at the sight and sound of them—since their face is a burning wind and their voice a serpent’s hiss according to Bernard [*Poem of Exhortation to Rainald, The Manner of Living Well*]⁴⁹—but also through their affecting countless men and domestic animals with sorcery. Her heart is called “bait,” that is, the imperceptible ill-will that holds sway in women’s hearts. Their hands are chains for restraining. For when they set their hand to affecting a creature with sorcery, then with the co-operation of the Devil they bring about what they undertake.

Sometimes, however, the *Malleus Maleficarum* refers to the predatory nature of the witches themselves:⁴⁹

46. The hunting and entrapment imagery has not been preserved in the Septuagint. The women are no longer hunting or ensnaring souls, but rather gathering (συσπρέφω) and distorting them (διασπρέφω and εκσπρέφω), and their victims are a gathering (συστροφή) in their hands; cf. Olley, *Ezekiel (Septuagint Commentary)*, 308–10. In the Vulgate the Hebrew verb *šûd* “to entrap, to hunt” is rendered with *cāpio* “to take, seize, catch”; *m^ešûda* “hunting net, prey” has a more similar translational equivalent: *ad praedandum* “to be a prey.”

47. According to the verse division in the Latin Vulgate.

48. *The Hammer of Witches* (ed. and trans. Mackay), 169–70. The curly brackets and their contents are added by the present author.

49. *Ibid.*, 285. The original Latin text uses the verb *īnsīdior* “to ambush, to lie in wait”; Henricus Institoris, *Malleus Maleficarum*, ed. and trans. Christopher S. Mackay (Cambridge:

There was also the common report (the story is from Judge Peter in Boltigen) that in the land of Berne thirteen babies were devoured by sorcerers, and for this reason public justice had blazed forth quite harshly against such parricides. When Peter asked a certain captured sorceress about the method by which they ate infants, she answered "The method is this. We prey on babies, especially those not yet baptized, but also those baptized, particularly when they are not protected with the Sign of the Cross or prayers."

According to verse 20 of our scriptural passage, the female soul hunters ensnare their victims *l'pōr'hōt* "for flying."⁵⁰ As observed earlier, scholars struggle to understand the meaning behind this obscure verse. Nevertheless, Ezekiel's accusation that these women hunt people in order to fly might not have sounded that strange to the demonologists. In the early modern witchcraft debate we regularly come across the belief that witches preyed on and killed small children in order to create an ointment from their young victims' body parts or fat which enabled them to fly, either by rubbing it on their means of transportation, or by applying it directly to their bodies:⁵¹

The method of transporting is as follows. [. . .] they have to make a paste from the limbs of children, especially those killed by them before Baptism, and by the demon's instructions they smear it on some seat or a piece of wood. When this has been done, they are immediately carried into the air [. . .]

Cambridge University Press, 2006), vol. 1, 397. For further examples of hunting and entrapment imagery, see Bodin, *Demon-Mania*, 44, 63, 85, 152; Del Río, *Investigations into Magic*, 120–21, 130, 132; James VI, *Daemonologie* (ed. Craigie), 5–6, 16, 30, 48; Weyer, *Witches, Devils, and Doctors*, 9, 173, 193, 528.

50. The Septuagint renders the Hebrew term *l'pōr'hōt* "for flying" with εἰς διασκορπισμόν "into dispersion"; the souls will be dispersed. The Vulgate connects the verb *vōlo* "to fly" with the souls: *animas volantes* "flying souls" and *animas ad volandum* "souls that should fly."

51. The following quotation is taken from *The Hammer of Witches* (ed. and trans. Mackay), 298. See also the reference to this particular ointment on page 285, which was quoted, and subsequently dismissed, by Weyer; *Witches, Devils, and Doctors*, 172–73, 176; cf. 225–28. Del Río also refers to this macrabe "flying unguent"; see *Investigations into Magic*, 92, 94–95, 119. For more general demonological discussions on the witch's transvection, both in a corporeal and non-corporeal sense, see Bodin, *Demon-Mania*, 112–21; *The Hammer of Witches* (ed. and trans. Mackay), 292–301; James VI, *Daemonologie* (ed. Craigie), 26–29; Weyer, *Witches, Devils, and Doctors*, 197–201; Del Río, *Investigations into Magic*, 91–98.

Moreover, across Europe witches confessed during their trials to having ridden to their gatherings on bewitched humans.⁵² Hence the prophet's accusation that the Judahite women ensnared people "for flying" is not that dissimilar to popular and learned beliefs about the witch's flight that we encounter during the early modern witch hunts.⁵³ Alternatively, as noted earlier,⁵⁴ *l'pōr'hōt* in verse 20 of our scriptural passage can be understood as "like birds" instead of "for flying"; the Judahite women hunt or ensnare people like birds. We saw that the scholars who prefer this reading of the Hebrew text vary in their interpretation of the birds. They are thought of either as actual birds or as a metaphor for the entrapped victims of the witch, or as the avian spirits of the dead. So far as I am aware, the birds have hitherto not been associated with the Judahite women *themselves*—that is, transformed into birds, these women hunt people. Although the idea of the witch's metamorphosis into a people-killing bird is unknown in the magico-religious belief system of ancient Israel and the wider ancient Near East,⁵⁵ it would have made sense to those early modern demonologists who

52. Ronald Hutton, *The Witch: A History of Fear, from Ancient Times to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 205; cf. 69–70. Prior to the emergence of the early modern elite discourse of witchcraft, there is an attestation of the idea that otherworldly, female-like beings used living people as horses for night flying. We find this idea in a Latin sermon from around 1400, written by Robert Rypon, the Benedictine monk from Durham Priory. These *phitonissae* would ride people all the way from England to Bordeaux, where they would get drunk on wine. See MS Harley 4894 fols 33r–34v (British Library, London); cf. Catherine Rider, *Magic and Religion in Medieval England* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 76–77. For further attestations of witches transforming their victims into horses and riding them, see Stith Thompson, *Motif-index of Folk-literature* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1955–8), vol. 3, 294 (G241.2 and sub-motifs).

53. On the popular origins of these beliefs and their impact on the learned attitudes toward witchcraft, see Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 44–49; cf. Hutton, *The Witch*, 120–46; Werner Tschacher, "Der Flug durch die Luft zwischen Illusionstheorie und Realitätsbeweis. Studien zum sog. Kanon Episcopi und zum Hexenflug," *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte: Kanonistische Abteilung* 85 (1999): 225–76. For a critical discussion on the early modern notions of the witches' flight and the ointment, and the treatment of these topics in witchcraft historiography, see Michael Ostling, "Babyfat and Belladonna: Witches' Ointment and the Contestation of Reality," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 11.1 (2016): 30–72.

54. See n. 6–7.

55. The closest resemblance to this idea is the Mesopotamian belief in Lilith, a flying female demon, who is a man-hunter and child-killer. The fear of Lilith seems to have spread beyond Mesopotamia across the Levant in the first millennium BCE;

were familiar with the classical Roman concept of the *strix*, a screeching owl-like creature that preyed on children at night. Around the beginning of the first millennium CE the *strix* started to evolve into a shape-shifting witch (also known as *striga*; plural *striges* or *strigae*); for instance, in the writings of Ovid and Apuleius.⁵⁶ Well-versed in classical literature, both Weyer and Del R  o indeed quote several ancient literary references to the *strix* and connect them with contemporary beliefs about witches who commit gruesome and murderous acts under the cover of darkness, be it in human or animal form, although the skepticism of the former demonologist is rivaled by the credulity of the latter.⁵⁷ One would thus think that for demonologists such as Weyer and Del R  o our scriptural passage would be yet another ancient reference to women who shape-shift into predatory, murderous birds.

Above I have discussed some elements in Ezek. 13:17–23 that are reminiscent of the figure of the witch and her *maleficium* as depicted in early modern demonology. I mentioned the gendered and collective notion of witchcraft, the binding magic, the imagery of hunting and entrapment, and the references to flying (or birds). Understandably, in such a historically and culturally distant scriptural passage we search in vain for similarities with other characteristics of the cumulative concept of witchcraft, such as the demonic pact, the Devil’s mark, and the Sabbat. However, given the similarities that

see, for instance, the possible reference to her in Isaiah 34:14. From the Middle Babylonian period onward Lilith’s character had become increasingly similar to that of Lamashtu, another female demon, who preyed in particular on pregnant women, newborn babies, and their mothers. Cf. Manfred Hutter, “Lilith,” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst (Leiden: Brill, 2nd ed., 1999), 520–21.

56. Ovid, *Fasti*, 6.131–46; Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 3.21. This conceptual development was followed by the conflation of the terms *strix* and *lamia* to designate a witch. The term *lamia* originated from Greek mythology, wherein it referred to a child-devouring demon. Further on the *strix* and the transformation of female demons into witches in the ancient world and beyond, see Daniel Ogden, *The Strix-Witch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

57. Del R  o, *Investigations into Magic*, 35, 119–20, cf. 100, 224–25; Weyer, *Witches, Devils, and Doctors*, 165–66. Phronimus, one of the interlocutors in Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola’s *Strix* (Bologna, 1523), relies heavily on the depiction of the *striges* by Ovid and Apuleius when he argues that witches can change their shape; cf. Peter Burke, “Witchcraft and Magic in Renaissance Italy: Gianfrancesco Pico and his *Strix*,” in *The Damned Art: Essays in the Literature of Witchcraft*, ed. Sydney Anglo (London: Routledge, 1977), 32–52, esp. 37–38.

are present, one would assume that Ezek. 13:17–23 served as an important proof text in the early modern witchcraft debate, holding the same status as other seminal scriptural texts.⁵⁸

OBSCURED THROUGHOUT THE AGES:
HOW EZEKIEL'S "WITCHES" REMAINED HIDDEN

Interestingly, hitherto I have been unable to find clear attestations of our scriptural passage in the early modern discourse of witchcraft. The demonologists seem to have been unaware of the occult depth of Ezek. 13:17–23.⁵⁹ How was this possible given the striking thematic similarities between this scriptural passage and demonological theory? There are several reasons for this lack of attestations.

As I have discussed elsewhere, the patristic exegesis of 1 Samuel 28, the story about King Saul's secret nocturnal visit to a female necromancer in Endor, had a profound influence on the interpretation of this narrative by the demonologists.⁶⁰ Thus the demonization of the Woman of Endor had a long antecedent tradition, reaching its climax in the early modern witchcraft debate. The reliance of the demonologists on the authority of the Church Fathers was by no means unique. Medieval scholasticism was deeply rooted in classical Christian exegesis, and the Renaissance, with its *ad fontes* motto, only reinforced the interest in the Church Fathers, whose writings became increasingly accessible through translations and textual research.⁶¹ Hence, in order to understand the absence of Ezek. 13:17–23 in demonological writings, we need to examine its reception in the patristic corpus.

In general, the Book of Ezekiel received comparatively little attention from the Church Fathers because of its difficult, challenging content.⁶² Subsequently, our scriptural passage has not been subjected to extensive patristic

58. E.g. Exod. 7–8, 22:18; Deut. 18:10–12; 1 Sam. 28; Job 1; Acts 8; Acts 16:16–18; 2 Thess. 2.

59. A reference to Ezekiel 13 in the margin of Bodin's *Réfutation des opinions de Jean Wier* ("Refutation of the Opinions of Johann Weyer") may be an exception to this phenomenon, and I will discuss his marginal note in more detail below.

60. Alinda Damsma, "Another Royal Encounter for the Woman of Endor: 1 Samuel 28 as a Proof Text in King James VI's *Daemonologie*," *Hebrew Studies* 62 (2021): 157–80.

61. Further on the role of the Church Fathers in scholasticism and the Renaissance, see James R. Ginther, "The Fathers and Scholasticism," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Patristics*, ed. Ken Parry (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 414–27.

62. Kenneth Stevenson and Michael Glerup (eds.), *Ezekiel, Daniel* (Ancient Christian commentary on Scripture. Old Testament; 13; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2008), xxi–xxvii.

exegesis. As I will discuss below, the most substantial treatment of Ezek. 13:17–23 is found in the writings of Origen and Jerome. Thereafter we merely find scattered references; for instance, in the works of Ambrose, Chrysostom, and Gregory the Great.

In the third homily on Ezekiel by Origen of Alexandria (c. 185–254) we find a non-literal understanding of Ezek. 13:17–23, which would set the tone for the classical Christian exegesis of this passage.⁶³ According to Origen, Ezekiel’s antagonists are not women, but deceitful teachers, such as the Gnostics Valentinus and Basilides. They are *prophetissae effeminae animae* “prophetesses, effeminate souls.” These men’s souls and wills have become feminized because they teach falsehoods, heretical doctrines, and therefore they are not worthy to be called “men.” Their empty words and happy promises are like lazily stitched-together pillows and concealing veils, which soothe the hearers and offer them a licence to chase earthly pleasures. As such, these wicked stitcheries and textiles destroy boys, youths, fathers, and elderly men by making their souls effeminate as well.⁶⁴ Origen’s homily contains a citation of Ezek. 13:18a (indicated by italics):⁶⁵

vae quippe, ait, his qui adsuunt cervicalia sub omni cubito manuum—sive manus
For he says, “Woe to those who stitch up pillows under all elbows—or (every) hand”

The original Greek text of this specific citation in Origen’s third homily has, unfortunately, not survived. However, a comparison between this citation and the renderings of Ezek. 13:18a in the *Vetus Latina* and Jerome’s *Vulgate* (c. 387–405) reveals a crucial difference:

63. The complete text of Origen’s homilies on Ezekiel has only survived in Jerome’s Latin translation (c. 379–82). I consulted the Latin text of the third homily as published in Roger Pearse and Mischa Hooker, *Origen of Alexandria: Exegetical Works on Ezekiel* (Ipswich: Chieftain Publishing, 2014), 90–108. The aforementioned study also contains the extant Greek fragments of Origen’s exposition of Ezek. 13:17–18, 20–23, the so-called *catenae* (*ibid.*, 552–63). The content of these *catenae*, which were part of medieval Bible commentaries, agrees with Origen’s non-literal interpretation in his third homily.

64. Effeminacy as a metaphor for moral and spiritual decline fits within the wider context of Origen’s highly gendered ethical and anthropological thought; see Kari Vogt, “‘Becoming Male’: One Aspect of an Early Christian Anthropology,” in *Feminism and Theology*, ed. Janet Martin Soskice and Diana Lipton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 49–61, esp. 52–55.

65. Pearse and Hooker, *Origen of Alexandria*, 96.

Vetus Latina:⁶⁶

vae his quae concinnant cervicalia sub omnem cubitum manus⁶⁷

Vulgate:

vae quae consuunt pulvillos sub omni cubito manus

In the citation of Ezek. 13:18a in Origen's third homily the feminine relative pronoun *quae* has changed into the masculine counterpart *qui*. Due to the absence of the Greek text, we cannot establish whether Origen himself had already changed the gender in this citation⁶⁸ or that it was caused by Jerome, who translated Origen's homilies on Ezekiel from Greek into Latin. The Church Fathers were known to alter the text of their scriptural quotations,⁶⁹ and hence the regendering will most likely have been caused by either Origen or Jerome. Interestingly, the same phenomenon is witnessed in the exposition of the other Church Fathers, as is shown below.

Jerome wrote *In Hiezechielem Prophetam* between 410 and 414, long after his Latin translation of Origen's homilies on Ezekiel. Origen's exegetical influence is noticeable, however, in Jerome's exposition of our scriptural passage.⁷⁰ Jerome starts his commentary on Ezek. 13:17–23 by briefly referring to Ezekiel's female adversaries as prophetesses, albeit false ones, who were under the influence of a demonic spirit and skilled in the evil arts. He puts them on par with the Woman of Endor in 1 Samuel 28 and the slave girl in

66. The Vetus Latina is the Latin translation of the Septuagint, which has the feminine gender in Ezek. 13:18a: οὐαὶ ταῖς συρραπτούσαις προσκεφάλαια "woe to those who stitch together cushions."

67. MS Sg. 1398b fol. 4r. I am grateful to Dr. Philipp Lenz, who kindly traced this manuscript for me in the St. Gallen Stiftungsbibliothek. Further on this version of the Vetus Latina, see Alban Dold, *Konstanzer altlateinische Propheten- und Evangelien-Bruchstücke mit Glossen nebst zugehörigen Prophetentexten aus Zürich und St. Gallen* (Beuron: Kunstschule der Erzabtei Beuron, 1923), 232; cf. Alban Dold, *Neue St. Galler vorhieronymianische Prophetenfragmente der St. Galler Sammelhandschrift 1398b zugehörig* (Beuron: Kunstschule der Erzabtei Beuron, 1940), esp. 7–21.

68. Note, however, that all the Greek renderings of Ezek. 13:18a listed in Origen's *Hexapla* read the feminine form, in accordance with the Hebrew source text: οὐαὶ ταῖς συρραπτούσαις. . . / οὐαὶ ταῖς ποιούσαις. . . ; *Origenis Hexaplorum*, ed. Frederick Field (Oxford: Clarendon, 1875), vol. 2, 800.

69. Pierre-Maurice Bogaert, "The Latin Bible," in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. James Carleton Paget and Joachim Schaper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 505–26, esp. 509.

70. Jerome, "Commentarii in Ezechielem," in *S. Hieronymi Presbyteri opera*, ed. Francisci Glorie (CCL 75; Turnhout: Brepols, 1 S. *Hieronymi Presbyteri opera*, ed. Francisci Glorie 1964), 144–48; cf. 150, 182.

Acts 16, and with the more recent Montanist prophetesses Maximilla and Prisca. Thus Jerome does not entirely ignore the women, but their magical practices are of no immediate concern to him. Instead, he interprets their evil arts as a metaphor for the corrupt teachings of contemporary soul-hunters, namely those teachers and philosophers whose heresies entrap God’s rightful servants and veil their heads, thus preventing them from contemplating the Lord’s glory. These heretics, both past and present, from Pythagoras to Jovinianus, either preach empty virtue and vain promises or propagate hedonism and lust. Their heretical depravity deceives and captures the souls of the righteous, and it prevents the wicked from repenting and regaining their righteousness.

A brief reference to Ezek. 13:18 is found in *De interpellatione Job et David* (“The Prayers of Job and David”) by Church Father Ambrose (c. 333–397), bishop of Milan. He refers to the verse as follows:⁷¹

vae his qui adsuunt cervicalia ad evertendas animas populi

woe to those who stitch up pillows to overthrow the souls of the people

Ambrose’s reading seems a free adaptation of the *Vetus Latina*, and just as in Origen’s third homily on Ezekiel the feminine relative pronoun *quae* has changed into the masculine form *qui*. Because of this gender difference, Ezekiel’s antagonists have become false male prophets. Ambrose subsequently connects this regendered quotation with Matthew 9:16: unlike those who stitch up pillows—the false male prophets—Christ does not patch the old to the new and the new to the old.⁷²

Church Father John Chrysostom (344/354–407), bishop of Constantinople, refers to Ezek. 13:19 in his exposition of Ephesians 5:5, 6.⁷³ He indirectly

71. Ambrose, “De interpellatione Job et David,” in *Sancti Ambrosii Opera*, ed. Karl Schenkl (CSEL 32; Leipzig: G. Freytag, 1897), vol. 2, 211–96, esp. 227.

72. Cf. the parallel in Jerome’s commentary on Ezek. 16:16; Jerome, “Commentarii in Ezechielem,” 182. Interestingly, in his quotation of Ezek. 13:18 in his exposition of Ezek. 16:16, Jerome uses *qui*, the masculine form of the relative pronoun, whereas in his translation of the same verse, earlier on in his commentary, he employs the correct, feminine form *quae* (*ibid.*, 144). Here we encounter another example of a discrepancy between the gender of Ezekiel’s antagonists in the Latin translations of Ezek. 13:18, on the one hand, and in the ad hoc references to the same verse by the Church Fathers, on the other. They freely adjusted the gender of the relative pronoun in their exposition of Ezek. 13:18 to suit their polemical agenda.

73. John Chrysostom, *In epistulam ad Ephesios commentarius*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Patrologia Graeca 62; Paris: Migne, 1862), cols. 9–176, esp. 121.

quotes and regenders this verse when he explains how there are those who speak gratifying, but ultimately empty and deceptive, words. According to Chrysostom, there were already false male prophets (ψευδοπροφηταί) in the time of Ezekiel who profaned God in front of his people for handfuls of barley.

Gregory the Great (c. 540–604), who became Pope Gregory I in 590, used the Vulgate for his quotation of Ezek. 13:18 in his pastoral treatise. However, his citation shows a crucial deviation from the Vulgate, which is underlined below:⁷⁴

Vae his qui consuunt pulvillos sub omni cubito manus et faciunt cervicalia sub capite universae aetatis ad capiendas animas

Woe to those who sew cushions under every elbow and make pillows for the heads of people of every age to catch souls

Again, the feminine relative pronoun *quae*, as found in the Vulgate, has been replaced by the masculine counterpart *qui*. Hence Pope Gregory’s quotation refers to seamsters rather than seamstresses. The masculinization of this verse fits well within the larger context of Pope Gregory’s pastoral rulebook. By abstaining from rebuke, the church leaders are like seamsters who make life comfortable for the sinner, as if the latter’s elbows are resting on cushions and his head on pillows. In addition, in Pope Gregory’s *Forty Gospel Homilies*, which he mainly preached in 591–2, he refers to Ezek. 13:19 in his attack on church leaders whose favoritism toward the guilty and hatred against the righteous cloud their judgments:⁷⁵

Unde recte per propheta dicitur: Mortificabant animas quae non moriuntur; et vivificabant animas quae non vivunt

Whence it is rightly said through prophecy, “they were putting to death souls which were not dying, and giving life to souls which were not living”

74. *Regula Pastoralis* 2.8 as found in John C. Hedley, Pope Gregory, *Lex levitarum, or, Preparation for the cure of souls: With the Regula Pastoralis of St. Gregory the Great* (New York: Benziger, 1905), 211.

75. Gregory the Great, *Opera omnia*, ed. Jacques–Paul Migne (Patrologia Latina 76; Paris: Migne, 1857), col. 1200. The *Vetus Latina* has the following rendering: *ad hoc-cidendas animas quas non oportebat mori; ad liberandum animas quas non oportebat vivere*. The Vulgate translates the passage as follows: *interficerent animas quae non moriuntur et vivificarent animas quae non vivunt*.

Again, Pope Gregory uses our scriptural passage to warn against corrupt behavior among contemporary male church leaders.

We can conclude from the meager patristic treatment of Ezek. 13:17–23 that the Church Fathers mainly referred to it to support their criticism of male teachers and leaders of the church, in line with their interpretation of Ezek. 13:1–16, in which Ezekiel attacks the false male prophets. Hence Ezekiel's female antagonists have been basically erased in the classical Christian exegesis of our scriptural passage. This is hardly surprising given the prevalent patristic perception of women and their gradual exclusion from authoritative ministerial roles in early Christianity.⁷⁶

Whereas patristic literature does not associate our scriptural passage with witchcraft, several Jewish sources from late antiquity perceive the Judahite women as witches. The rendering of Ezek. 13:17–23 in Targum Jonathan, the Jewish Aramaic translation of the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible, leaves no room for doubt: the women are witches who perform ominous rituals with "dark rags" (*riq'ē ḥāšōk*).⁷⁷ In the expansive Targumic rendering of verse 20 the women themselves (!) confirm that they perform witchcraft: "with these [i.e. the dark rags] we bewitch souls to destruction" (*b'hôn 'ānahmā mahīr'sān yāt nap'sān l'abbādā*). The Targumic interpretation of the Judahite women as witches agrees with the Talmudic exegesis of this passage. In *bEruvin* 64b Rav Assi and Rav Ashi are involved in a discussion about the dangers of eating randomly left bread. If it is an entire loaf, it could have been left behind on purpose by a witch, who is usually female according to the rabbinic discourse of witchcraft. It is safe, however, to eat discarded pieces of bread because they cannot be bewitched. Subsequently, the pieces of bread referred to in Ezek. 13:19 are understood as a means of payment to witches rather than edibles bewitched by them.⁷⁸ Targum Jonathan and Talmud Bavli

76. See Francine Cardman, "Women, Ministry, and Church Order in Early Christianity," in *Women & Christian Origins*, ed. Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 300–29.

77. The Targumic text is based on Alexander Sperber, *The Bible in Aramaic Based on Old Manuscripts and Printed Texts* (Leiden: Brill, repr. ed., 2004). Levey renders *riq'ē ḥāšōk* with "black patches," but the reading "dark rags" is preferable; cf. Samson H. Levey, *The Targum of Ezekiel* (AramB, 13; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987), 45–46.

78. The rabbinic discussion goes back to the ambiguity in the Hebrew text of Ezek. 13:19, where the Judahite women are accused of having profaned God either *for* or *with* pieces of bread (cf. n. 5). Since the 1990s there has been an increase in scholarly interest in the gendered conception of magic and witchcraft in late antique Jewish society and literature; for a recent overview, see Sara Ronis, "Gender, Sex, and Witchcraft in Late Ancient Judaism," in *A Companion to Late Ancient Jews and Judaism, 3rd Century BCE–7th*

underwent their redaction in the Babylonian Jewish diaspora, and this exegetical tradition may thus have eastern roots. An eastern provenance would explain why this interpretation was seemingly unknown in Palestine and beyond in late antiquity, leaving the Church Fathers unaware of it too.⁷⁹ However, in the following centuries this interpretative tradition traveled steadily westwards, and it was reiterated and reinforced by medieval Jewish exegetes in Europe, such as Samuel ben Meir (Rashbam), David Kimḥi (Radak), Isaiah of Trani (Rid), and Isaac ben Judah Abarbanel (Abarbanel).⁸⁰ Interestingly, I also found a reference to our scriptural passage in *Sefer Ḥasidim* (“Book of the Pious”). In this Hebrew text, which was composed by Rhinish Jews in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, the reader is warned about the existence of outwardly devout, synagogue-visiting women who are, in reality, child-eating witches.⁸¹ Ezek. 13:21 is used as a proof text in this passage about cannibalistic female witches, which also demonstrates how deeply influenced the Jews in the Rhineland were by the Gentile concept of witchcraft.⁸² Nevertheless, these interpretations of the Judahite women as witches were not picked up by the demonologists who were, directly or indirectly, acquainted with medieval Jewish exegesis.⁸³ An exception to this

Century CE, eds. Naomi Koltun-Fromm and Gwynn Kessler (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020), 391–404 and the literature cited therein.

79. The influence of rabbinic thought on patristic literature is discussed in Samuel Krauss, *The Jews in the Works of the Church Fathers: Sources for Understanding the Agaddah* (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2007). The fact that Ezekiel 13 was not listed as a *haftarah*, i.e. a selected portion from the Prophets that accompanied the weekly synagogal Torah reading, may further account for the lack of rabbinic attention to this passage.

80. Cf. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 245; Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 24–27.

81. *Sefer Ḥasidim*, ed. Reuven Margalioṭ (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1957), §411, cf. §680. Further on this passage, see Jeffrey H. Chajes, *Between Worlds: Dybbuks, Exorcists, and Early Modern Judaism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 4–5; Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion* (New York: Behrman’s Jewish Book House, 1939), 227.

82. On the pagan Germanic roots of this concept, see Hutton, *The Witch*, 70–72.

83. See, for instance, the references to medieval Jewish Bible scholars in Del Río, *Investigations into Magic*, 94; *The Hammer of Witches* (ed. and trans. Mackay), 216, 226; Weyer, *Witches, Devils, and Doctors*, 97, 130. Moreover, several incunabula and sixteenth-century Bible editions contained commentaries on Ezek. 13:17–23 by medieval Jewish exegetes, such as David Kimḥi; see, for instance, the Second Rabbinic Bible (Venice, 1524–5), which also included the rendering of this passage in Targum Jonathan; cf. n. 32. On the popularity of the Second Rabbinic Bible among Christian Hebraists during the sixteenth century, see Stephen G. Burnett, “The Strange Career of the Biblia Rabbinica among Christian Hebraists, 1517–1620,” in *Shaping the Bible in the Reformation*,

phenomenon might be an intriguing reference to Ezekiel 13 in the margin of Bodin's *Réfutation des opinions de Jean Wier*.⁸⁴ Bodin mentions this chapter, among several other scriptural passages, to prove that the Bible does speak of witches, something which is denied by Weyer. Could Bodin have been influenced by the Jewish exegetical views on the Judahite women? After all, he was known for his Judaizing sympathies, and his writings contain frequent references to the Talmud, Targums, and medieval Jewish commentaries.⁸⁵ Hence, Bodin might have gained knowledge of the Jewish exegesis of Ezek. 13:17–23 through personal study of these sources.

During the Reformation and Counter-Reformation there was a noticeable lack of exposition of Ezek. 13:17–23, just as in the early Christian exegetical tradition. Again, the length and complexity of the Book of Ezekiel may account for the scarcity of exegetical materials, as well as its canonical position after Isaiah and Jeremiah, two other voluminous prophetic works.⁸⁶ The lack of interest in Ezek. 13:17–23 in particular can be explained by the continuous reliance on the early Church Fathers, who had hardly dealt with our scriptural passage, let alone read it in an occult manner, as discussed above. To further understand the rather limited attention to Ezek. 13:17–23 by the Christian Bible commentators, we need to differentiate between Catholic and Protestant exegetical traditions. Before the mid-sixteenth century and under the influence of the Renaissance *ad fontes* ideal, Catholic exegetes would freely engage in

eds. Bruce Gordon and Matthew McLean (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 63–84. Interestingly, the orientalist Andreas Masius, on whose Hebraic and Judaic expertise Weyer relied, was well acquainted with the rabbinic Bibles and their medieval Jewish commentaries; Burnett, "The Strange Career," 78–79 n. 59.

84. Paris, Jacques du Puys, 1580, fol. 226v: <https://archive.org/details/delademonomanied00bodi/page/n489/mode/2up>, accessed March 10, 2022; cf. Jean Bodin, *De la démonomanie des sorciers*, eds. Virginia Krause et al. (Geneva: Droz, 2016), 452 n. iii. Ezekiel 13 is also mentioned in passing earlier on in Bodin's *Démonomanie*, namely, in his discussion of the Hebrew verb *qāsam* "to divine," which refers to illicit divinatory practices: Paris, Jacques du Puys, 1580, fol. 46v: <https://archive.org/details/delademonomanied00bodi/page/n127/mode/2up>, accessed March 10, 2022; cf. Bodin, *Démonomanie*, ed. Virginia Krause et al., 164. However, this verb is also found in the first part of Ezekiel 13, in which the prophet berates the false male prophets.

85. On Bodin's Hebrew knowledge and his use of Jewish sources, see Jacob Guttman, *Über Jean Bodin in seinen Beziehungen zum Judentum* (Breslau: Koebner, 1905), esp. 11–25, 46–65. Interestingly, Bodin's teachers were the Christian Hebraists Jean Mercier and Jean Cinqarbres, who were well acquainted with the Hebrew Bible editions, medieval Jewish commentaries, and Targumic versions that circulated in their time. Burnett, "The Strange Career," 71–72, 78 n. 59; Guttman, *Über Jean Bodin*, 18.

86. As observed by Carl L. Beckwith (ed.), *Ezekiel, Daniel* (Reformation Commentary on Scripture. Old Testament; 12; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2012), xli.

the study of the Hebrew source text and its ancient versions. However, the Council of Trent (1545–63) marked a radical departure from this humanistic-philological approach. Thenceforth the Vulgate became the authorized textual basis for scriptural exegesis.⁸⁷ Since Jerome’s Latin rendering of Ezek. 13:17–23 was an obscure witness due to the linguistic and textual complexities of the Hebrew source text,⁸⁸ the occult depth of our scriptural passage went wholly unnoticed.

Although the reformers were not tied to the Vulgate as their sole gateway to the scriptures, nor governed by patristic exegetical traditions,⁸⁹ they did not readily identify Ezek. 13:17–23 as a passage which referred to witches and *maleficium*. Among the very few Protestant Bible commentators who engaged with our scriptural passage, Calvin’s exposition is the longest. It is part of his lectures on the first twenty chapters of Ezekiel, which he gave in 1563–4, in the final stage of his life.⁹⁰ According to Calvin, these false prophetesses were Satan’s servants, spreading his lies and deceit. They used the pillows to make their unassuming clients feel comfortable. The head coverings were either used by the women themselves, to focus on their spiritual eyesight, in the same manner as the Roman augurs, or they were meant to cover their clients, who would hear the false oracles without any visual distractions. As long as the women would get paid for their corrupt prophetic services, they welcomed any client. As such, they engaged in a promiscuous trade and prostituted their oracles to anyone who was willing to pay. In Calvin’s lengthy exposition, which can only be briefly touched upon here, the vocabulary is reminiscent of the language with which witches and their diabolic master are commonly described in demonologies: Satan is able to transform himself into an angel of light (cf. 2 Cor. 11:14), and his easily recruited female servants are greedy and behave wantonly, alluring and entrapping wretched souls to their destruction. However, Calvin does not explicitly equate Ezekiel’s female

87. Haustein, “Bibelauslegung und Bibelkritik,” 257.

88. See nn. 43, 46, and 50.

89. In fact, both Luther and Calvin dismissed Jerome’s commentary on Ezekiel; Jerome, *Commentary on Ezekiel*, trans. Thomas P. Scheck (ACW 71; New York/Marwah, N.J.: The Newman Press, 2017), 6. Nevertheless, more generally, the reformers did incorporate patristic thoughts into their writings; cf. Leif Grane, Alfred Schindler, and Markus Wreidt eds., *Auctoritas patrum: Contributions on the Reception of the Church Fathers in the 15th and 16th Century* (Mainz: Phillip von Zabern, 1993).

90. For the English translation, see John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Twenty Chapters of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, trans. Thomas Myers (2 vols; Edinburgh, 1849–50). Calvin’s exposition of Ezek. 13:17–23 is found in lectures 36–7; *ibid.*, 27–44.

adversaries with contemporary witches.⁹¹ Instead, his exegesis takes aim at the Catholic Church, especially at its pardoning rituals, which he compares with the women's giving and taking life for a reward. In that respect, Calvin's exposition is similar to patristic exegesis: the Church Fathers used this passage to criticize contemporary heresies, and the reformer sees parallels between the women's activities and "papish" corruption.

Interestingly, according to the paratext of Ezek. 13:18 in the Geneva Bible (1560), Ezekiel's female antagonists give men pillows and head coverings to "allure them and bewitch them."⁹² Calvin's frequent references to these women's promiscuity were only meant metaphorically, but this marginal note in the Geneva Bible portrays them as actual temptresses and witches.⁹³ The influence of Calvin's doctrines is noticeable throughout the paratext in the Geneva Bible;⁹⁴ could this particular annotation also have been influenced by the reformer? From 1552 until 1554 Calvin had preached

91. On Calvin's attitude toward the reality of witches and witchcraft, and the influence of these views on his biblical exegesis, see Jörg Hausteine, "John Calvin," *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition* (ed. R. M. Golden; 4 vols.; Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 158–59; cf. Jeffrey R. Watt, "Calvin's Geneva Confronts Magic and Witchcraft: The Evidence from the Consistory," *Journal of Early Modern History* 17 (2013): 215–44.

92. *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition*, ed. Lloyd E. Berry (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 339.

93. The sexualization of Ezekiel's female adversaries in the margin of the Geneva Bible, which is implicit in Calvin's commentary, fits within the stereotypical portrayal of the witch in the early modern witchcraft debate. This phenomenon is reminiscent of the "witch and whore" trope found throughout the Bible; Hamori, *Women's Divination*, 203–16. Liebermann observes that the references to hunting and bread in the source text of Ezek. 13:17–23 are also found in Prov. 6:26, which speaks of the price of a prostitute. Ezekiel may have done this intentionally to associate the prophetesses with prostitution; Liebermann, "For-Profit Prophets," 231.

94. David Daniell, *The Bible in English* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 304–10. The Geneva Bible was used by demonologists such as Scot and King James VI and it remained popular for a long time, even after the publication of the King James Version in 1611. Since some of the Geneva Bible's marginal notes seem reliant on the paratext in the French Protestant Bibles, we should not rule out the possibility that the latter exerted their influence on the annotator of our scriptural passage; cf. Maurice S. Betteridge, "The Bitter Notes: The Geneva Bible and Its Annotations," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 14 (1983): 41–62. I consulted Ezek. 13:17–23 in Olivétan's French Bible (1535), but could not find a parallel with the marginal note to Ezek. 13:18 in the Geneva Bible. I did not have access to Calvin's revisions of the *Bible d'Olivétan*. The paratext of the Luther Bible (1534) does not associate our scriptural passage with witches or witchcraft.

on the Book of Ezekiel in Geneva's Temple de la Madeleine, and his views might have disseminated and influenced the translators of the Geneva Bible, who gave their own twist to his exposition by transforming the false prophetesses into seductive witches.⁹⁵ Alternatively, the translators might have adopted the notion of these women as witches from the medieval Jewish commentators, mentioned above, with whose work they appear to have been familiar.⁹⁶

Halfway through the seventeenth century the English Protestants William Greenhill and John Mayer published their respective commentaries on Ezekiel. The exposition of Ezek. 13:17–23 in both works is influenced by the exegesis of the Church Fathers and, especially, Calvin. Unsurprisingly, then, neither exposition explicitly equates the false prophetesses with witches. In passing, Mayer compares Ezekiel's female adversaries with "women called Gypsies, that now go about to tell fortunes for any little peice of silver,"⁹⁷ and Greenhill briefly refers to the view of these women as sorceresses, without mentioning the sources thereof.⁹⁸ These are one-off remarks, though, in their commentaries, which were published when England had just witnessed some of its fiercest witch hunts during the Civil War.

We now understand better why the demonologists overlooked our scriptural passage: its obscure Hebrew source text led to equally obscure ancient versions, which served as the textual basis for the meager patristic exegesis, which in turn affected subsequent exegetical traditions. As such, the reception history of Ezek. 13:17–23 went in the completely opposite direction to that of 1 Samuel 28, the story about the Woman of Endor, who became known as "the Witch of Endor" and featured prominently in the early modern witchcraft debate. Paradoxically, the women whose biblical portrayal comes closest to the concept of the witch in the early modern discourse of witchcraft were the ones who remained undiscovered by the demonologists.

95. Calvin's sermons on Ezekiel (1552–54) have hitherto remained unpublished. The extant manuscripts are held in the Bibliothèque publique et universitaire de Genève (MS. fr. 21–3). It has been beyond the scope of the present study to consult Calvin's exposition of Ezek. 13:17–23 in the undigitized Ms. fr. 21. Further on Calvin's *sermons inédits*, see Erik A. de Boer, *John Calvin on the Visions of Ezekiel* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), esp. 1–2.

96. Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 307.

97. John Mayer, *A Commentary upon All the Prophets Both Great and Small* (London: Abraham Miller and Ellen Cotes, 1652), 404–6, esp. 405.

98. William Greenhill, *An Exposition of Ezekiel*, ed. James Sherman (London: Samuel Holdsworth, 1839), 310–13, esp. 310.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Ezekiel's "witches" could also remain hidden because our understanding of magic and divination in the ancient Near East only blossomed from the mid-nineteenth century when significant archaeological discoveries were made, such as king Ashurbanipal's library in former Nineveh, which yielded the aforementioned Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft incantation series *Maqlû*. It was not only the rapid advances in ancient Near Eastern archaeology that illuminated our scriptural passage, but also the burgeoning field of anthropology. In his seminal *The Golden Bough* (first edition 1890), James Frazer compared Ezek. 13:17–23 to more recent soul-hunting practices.⁹⁹ Prior biblical translators and commentators did not have access to these revealing archaeological and anthropological insights, which made it even more challenging for them to establish the meaning of this mysterious passage. In a sense this was a positive development because the women in Ezek. 13:17–23 remained obscured from the prying eyes of the demonologists, who sought scriptural justifications for their doctrines and interspersed their writings with proof-texts. Hence our passage escaped the fate which befell numerous other scriptural texts. Whoever they truly had been, and whatever they had really done, Ezekiel's "witches" were luckily spared further demonization thanks to their obscurity, which worked its magic throughout the ages.

99. James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion* (1st ed., London: Macmillan & Co., 1894), vol. 1, 140 n. 456. Frazer credited his friend Prof. William Robertson Smith for this observation.